

New Database Will Help Genealogists Find the Built Environment in Indiana

Any genealogist knows that all the information you need about your ancestors, their lives, their homes, and their cemeteries is not in one place. You might have to visit ten libraries, half a dozen websites, and make numerous phone calls just to get that single document you need. Wouldn't it be great if everything were in one place? While we won't see this happening any time soon, the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology (DHPA) is working to make finding information about the historic properties and cemeteries throughout the state a little easier with the launch of a new database on its website in 2010.

Because of a variety of federal and state mandates, the DHPA has been collecting data about historic properties through various programs since 1975. With 92 counties and various programs looking at different things (houses, commercial buildings, bridges, cemeteries.....the list goes on and on) it means A LOT of paper has been accumulated. The largest and most comprehensive program is known as the Indiana Historic Structures and Sites Inventory (IHSSI). For these surveys, staff roams the streets of counties looking for the extant historic built environment, filling out paper forms for each historic property they find. Sometimes sites are not included in the IHSSI survey: when the site cannot be found or when access to the property is denied by the private property owner, making it impossible to conduct a survey of the site. For the IHSSI, when we say built environment, we mean buildings, bridges, historic markers, and cemeteries; when we say historic, we mean those structures constructed at least 40 years before the start of that county's survey. The county survey program has evolved over the years, both in

methodology and in technology. Since the program started in the late 1970s, we have gotten better at how we conduct the program and have broadened our view of what is important to the history of the state. Early surveys focused basically on buildings, although bridges, elaborately design cemeteries, and some historic markers were included. Later, staff realized the importance to our state that other areas, like small family cemeteries or landscaped designed parks and settings, had on Indiana's history, so the methodology changed to include more of these resources. One of the first counties surveyed was Parke County (conducted in 1978). Less than 500 sites were identified. No building built after 1940 was cataloged and no cemeteries were identified. The county was recently re-surveyed in 2008. The date of inclusion extended to 1968 and these additional types of structures were included, increasing the number of sites to 1134, including 67 cemeteries. Starting in 2008, the office began the transition away from paper survey forms to the use of electronic tablets (like laptops) to capture all information. The surveys collected through the use of the tablets can be converted into online database more efficiently and more quickly.

Over the years, other surveys have been completed on topic specific structures: starting in 2003, the office launched the Historic Theater Initiative, which is attempting to locate and document all theaters whether extant or demolished. With this program we have collected historic photographs, are taking current photographs of the condition of extant theaters, and are copying paper documents about theaters. Since the late 1990s, in cooperation with the Indiana Department of Transportation, the office has had an ongoing historic bridge inventory. This survey program contains photographic evidence about bridges, their styles, builders, dates of construction, and reports of their condition. In

2001 the Cemetery and Burial Ground Registry began, which strives to document every known cemetery and burial ground in the State.

Another invaluable resource housed at the DHPA is the National Register of Historic Places, which has detailed information on roughly 2000 sites. The National Register of Historic Places is the federal list of historic properties that have been formally recognized by the National Park Service. Not all “old” buildings are eligible for listing in the Register and not all important structures are yet listed in the Register. The information found in the Register includes photographs, a history of the property, construction dates, architectural style, and builder.

The distribution of the information collected through the various programs occurs in three main forms (paper documents, websites, and books), all of which are limited. The Historic Theater Initiative offers limited information on the Division’s website; the bridge inventory has records accessible in-house, limited photographs on the website, and two books; data collected from the IHSSI countywide surveys usually takes the public form of a book, called Interim Reports. You may have seen them at your local library or historical society. A book is simply a snapshot in time of what the built environment looked like in that county. The Interim Report contains a few photographs of only select structures, and limited information on each site surveyed. A problem with the books is that overtime they cannot be updated. If a house is preserved, destroyed by fire, or demolished the Interim Report cannot be updated, and therefore does not reflect current information. The paper work in the office can be updated, but few people have the opportunity to conduct a records check in our office. For someone living in California,

these types of record checks are nearly impossible. Researchers and genealogists therefore rely on the interim reports for their information, which might be out-of-date.

In an attempt to make all records more accessible, the DHPA launched a new online database - the State Historic Architectural and Archaeological Research Database (SHAARD) in 2009. SHAARD has been made possible with financial support from the Federal Highway Administration, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and the Historic Preservation Fund of the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. SHAARD allows users to search resource information on known historic properties and cemeteries throughout Indiana. Currently, SHAARD includes data about cemeteries and burial grounds, historic bridges, properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places, historic theaters, and sites surveyed in Indiana Survey of Historic Sites and Structures files. Not all the data from each subject area is in the database, yet. With over 250,000 paper records, it will take some time for the staff to convert all of this paper data into the electronic database. SHAARD does offer us the potential to make all the information in these paper files on Indiana's rich heritage available electronically to citizens, consultants, agency representatives and scholars for the first time.

For the genealogy user, SHAARD will be especially helpful. Want to learn more about the county where ancestor lived? SHAARD can show you the built environment: the buildings, bridges, and structures that still exist today. A feature that will be added in 2011 is short county and township histories. As staff has time to conduct research, these whitepapers will be added to the appropriate record. With more detail about the development of the community, you can understand better how your ancestor might have fallen into the context of the county's or township's development. When buildings are

rated “outstanding” by the survey program, more research is being done on the house and the historic property owners, to give a broader perspective. This additional information is included, as well of current photographs and site maps. Each year approximately, three counties will be re-surveyed and this information will be immediately included in SHAARD. Coinciding with the information from the new surveys, data from older surveys are being entered in to the database.

A simple search in SHAARD’s IHSSI records can show you how many historic buildings still stand in a county. For example, a search of Warrick County, Boon Township reveals that 407 structures. You’ll find records and facts on the churches, cemeteries, commercial buildings, and homes in the county. Also included is information about the architectural style of the structures, the approximate year of construction, any additions or alterations to buildings, and construction material. One example is the Wilford Bacon Hoggett house, built in 1886 in the Free Classic style. From the record you can determine that it is a 2 ½ story home with little alteration to the historical integrity. Also included is a short history of the home.

For those homes or commercial buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places, you can find the history of the structure, the National Register application, and any historic photos the office has. It is anticipated that the entering of all of the National Register documentation will be concluded by the end of 2011.

Another dataset for genealogists to use in SHAARD comes from the Cemetery and Burial Ground Registry, started in 2001 by state law. The intent was to create a single place for the information and locations of all known cemeteries and burial sites in the State. The thought of law makers was that the main consumer of this data would be

archaeologists, construction companies, county planners, and managers of other “construction” based activities; the goal of the law was to help these individuals respect the dead by preventing the unearthing of human remains. Quickly DHPA staff realized the information being collected would also be helpful to genealogists. Because of that, other details besides locational information have been collected. Basic information about ethnicity, religion, and the art and architecture of each cemetery is also gathered.

The first year, staff worked on discovering and collecting what was already there, who was conducting similar cemetery surveys and how everyone could work together to share the information. Then we began looking for new information. Staff and volunteers are now visiting each cemetery, filling out our in-house form, and trying to determine the size and shape of the site, if at all possible. The Cemetery Registry staff will continue to do research to find the locations (or as close as possible) of the lost cemeteries – those sites that have had the grave stones removed or perhaps never had a tombstone.

Locating lost cemeteries is difficult. We conduct archival research and by looking at historic maps, reading county histories, or going through deeds we can glean the approximate location of many cemeteries which no longer have tombstones. Sometimes we get lucky and can pinpoint the location. But, with no above ground evidence of their existence, getting an exact size may never be feasible. For some cemeteries, all we’ll have is a general location.

It was determined at the beginning of the project though that the location of each burial or the names of all persons buried in a cemetery would not be sought or maintained; given the scope of that project alone, it would take a lifetime. Because of that, SHAARD will not be able to help you find the burial location if all you know is

your ancestor's name. Where SHAARD will help is when you know the name of your ancestor's resting place, but just don't know where the cemetery is. You can search SHAARD by county, township, or just the cemetery's name. Then, you can look at each file and see if it is likely your ancestor's burial place. Some cemeteries have burial readings (a list created when individuals have catalogued every stone in the cemetery). When we have the information and it can be posted on the internet, we also will have PDFs of stone readings. The SHAARD record for a cemetery will also have all in-house photos, histories of the cemetery, and other documentation that will help you better see and understand the location where your ancestor is buried.

One variation of SHAARD compared to many other cemetery registries is the locational information. For many cemetery registries, it might only offer the name of the road, an intersection, or the name of the landowner when the registry was published. DHPA is using current technology to record with greater accuracy the location of each site. Once the boundaries of the cemetery are estimated, the DHPA gathers coordinates using a global positioning system (GPS). We collect readings at several locations so that it will show the known corners of each cemetery and these readings never change. In 100 years, the name of the road on which the cemetery is located might change names, the road could be realigned or might not even exist, but someone could take the GPS readings and go back to the same exact spot. What does this mean for the cemetery? By sharing the GPS readings with individuals (like building departments or construction companies) this means they can plan their construction projects and take into account the location of graves and work to avoid disturbance of graves or human remains. What do GPS readings mean for you? You can take these coordinates and with a GPS unit, go

directly to the site. But what if you do not have a GPS unit? As the DHPA works on the next level of SHAARD, we will be taking these coordinates and creating maps. Starting in 2012, not only will you be able to search SHAARD for the name of a cemetery, but you'll be able to see it on a map and know how to get there. Or, if you know your ancestors are buried near the town of Brazil, IN but you are not certain where, you can go to the map, find Brazil and see all the cemeteries in the area.... or township, or county – you decide. Then each cemetery on the map is linked back to SHAARD – where you can find what we know about the cemetery.

Another exciting component of SHAARD is the ability to attach documents to the record. This means when conducting our research, if we find historic photos, burial listings, deeds, or other supporting documentation we can put it online – that is if we have permission. In regards to cemeteries, often times the county genealogy society or an individual will do the work to read the name of every name in a cemetery. When these readings are published into a book to then be sold, DHPA respects the rights of that author to sell their book. Without their permission, burials lists are never placed online. But, we do share bibliography information, so we'll tell you where you can find that information.

SHAARD is constantly evolving. One of the best things about this online database is the ease in which information about cemeteries or buildings can be updated or improved. Every day, staff conducts more research, visits more sites, and pinpoints previously unknown locations. With the new online database, this information can be updated the instant the office knows about the change – and if you live in California, you too could see the change. Recently, our office received information about a cemetery that

was moved. Within five minutes of receiving the confirmation that the graves were disinterred, the SHAARD entry for that cemetery reflected the change in location. In other instances, staff reads in the paper or sees on the evening news that a building burned in a fire. The next morning the entry found in SHAARD related to that building is updated. The DHPA also accepts information from the general public. If you find a record on your family cemetery or home, but little is known about it, you can submit information, photographs, and documentation which can almost instantaneously be updated to the database. A simple email to the Cemetery and Burial Ground Registry coordinator (jrdinius@dnr.in.gov) will help improve the data set.

To get to SHAARD, go to www.SHAARD.dnr.in.gov, log in as a guest (look for the button on the top, right-hand corner of the page), agree to the terms and conditions of the database, and get searching. But don't just visit once. Check back often and see if your family's built legacy is there, updated. It is the hope of the DHPA that SHAARD will make finding information on your family's homes, other buildings, or cemeteries are easier to find.